



COOPERATIVE PRESCHOOL

The Daily Schedule and Nature

Drop Off

The morning drop off process gives us an opportunity to welcome students warmly and make them and their guardians feel safe as they arrive at school. Students are given time to play in the natural area nearby exploring puddles, ice, snow, and reconnecting with each other. Teachers use this time to assess that they have arrived prepared for the day with food, water, and the proper clothing and note if students will need to borrow any gear that day. As students reacclimate to the school environment, they are brought inside to use the bathroom and are read stories while they wait. This way, teachers can model and encourage hygienic bathroom use and set the students up for a successful start to their day. Reading stories as a group helps them practice self-control and exposes them to early literacy elements such as left to right orientation, written language and the structure of a story. As students finish with the bathroom we transition to their respective classrooms.



Students play on snow banks engaging in social play and exercising gross motor skills

Unstructured Play

As students arrive to their classrooms they are greeted by morning invitations to play. Students start by neatly putting away their personal belongings and marking themselves as present, then are encouraged to engage in the invitations. Invitations are created daily to reflect the weekly nature theme, offer a variety of opportunities across all ECE domains, and are designed to fit the needs and interests of the students. In fall and spring the invitations are outside. Natural loose parts and nature concepts are embedded in the activities. This is a key time of exploration and social emotional growth opportunity. Students are encouraged to use materials creatively, problem solve, and manage conflict with support as needed.



Students manipulate water with pipes and buckets using STEAM and problem solving skills

Morning Meeting

Morning meeting is a community oriented and teacher led part of the day. Students transition to the circle through song and calming activities such as breathing techniques, I love you rituals, and mindfulness. Morning meeting includes direct instruction on skills specific to the early literacy, early numeracy, gross motor, fine motor and social/emotional domains. It is also a time to introduce key concepts related to the weekly nature theme through books, games, and movement. Throughout morning meeting, students practice self-restraint and managing their bodies with help from the supporting teacher. This is the key time during the day where students and teachers come together as a community and develop a group identity.



A teacher demonstrates how to appropriately use paint and paint brushes

Snack

Snack time allows for students to fuel their bodies with healthy food choices and socialize or play group games. Students transition to hand washing in small groups or one at a time and then are given time to practice proper hand washing technique before finding a spot to sit and eat. Teachers use this time to encourage conversational skills and model appropriate interaction. Occasionally teachers facilitate focusing activities such as riddles, rhyming, or regulation games like the quiet game. As is seasonally appropriate, we have snack outside, which introduces the importance of cleaning up after ourselves to prevent litter or accidentally feeding wild animals.



Students learn how to press cider and have a cider and apple snack

Project

Project time focuses on a deeper exploration of the weekly theme through one or two domains each day. The project time is intended to foster skill building, independence, and challenge their brains. It's a time to scaffold new skills or tools then provide observed time to practice safe and respectful use of the materials. While project time is teacher led, teachers work in opportunities for students to personalize their experience. Once or twice a week, project time is used for a hike on the Copper Cannon campus. Hikes immerse the students in the natural world and are a time to focus on observational skills, safe movement through the space, and nature appreciation. Students are able to directly see the weekly theme in their local ecosystem and strengthen their connection to their environment.



A student exercises motor skills and spatial awareness avoiding a "spider web"

Outdoor Classroom

Students engage in at least an hour of unstructured time in the outdoor classroom space daily. The outdoor classroom is a part of the forest with a clear boundary and a collection of tools and open-ended materials such as pots, trucks, shovels, and tires. This time is entirely student led and an opportunity for in depth social/emotional work through play. As students develop games with each other, teachers are observing and able to assist them through the conflict resolution process. Students are encouraged to use the natural materials available and develop their gross motor skills through climbing, jumping, running, lifting, and digging. The students hone their risk assessment abilities and engage in risky play with teacher observation.



Students enjoy some cooperative dramatic play in the outdoor classroom



The owl class eats lunch together in the forest practicing social and emotional skills

Pick Up

As students finish lunch, they work on packing up their backpacks as independently as possible. Support and scaffolding is provided with organizing backpacks and zipping as well as packaging wet clothes for bringing home. Students receive a “cubby check” then they’re able to engage in a few options such as building, drawing, or playing in the surrounding natural environment as they wait for their parent or guardian to arrive.



Two students hold hands as they walk to rest time



A student looks at a book in his hammock during rest time

Rest Time

For students who have extended day, rest time makes up the focus of that time. Students use the bathrooms then either move to the hammock garden by the outdoor classroom or the indoor classroom where mats are spread out with blankets, books, and comfort items. Whether outside or inside, rest time is started with a circle and a calming activity then students are on their mats or in their hammocks for forty five minutes to an hour. Half way through they can choose a quiet activity. This provides time for their bodies to rest and sleep if they need it or engage their brain in quiet activities like puzzles and books. When outside, students can tune into the rhythms of the natural world and foster a sense of connection and peace. Students can observe the natural moments taking place around them.

Throughout each day, students are immersed in the natural environment, building connections and a sense of place. During nature based play, opportunities abound for the five early childhood education domains of early literacy, early numeracy, gross motor, fine motor, and social and emotional skills. The natural integration of the preschool goals and a nature oriented daily rhythm create a holistic and grounded program in which students thrive.